CLAIMS

1. A method of collecting product data, comprising the steps of:

generating a profile identifying a given site URL, an item to be queried, and a scan interval;

on a periodic basis as defined by the scan interval, retrieving data from the given site URL; and

parsing the retrieved data according to a site template to generate a data record comprising an item name and an associated price value.

2. The method as described in Claim **1** further including the step of storing the data record.

3. The method as described in Claim **1** further including the step of:

comparing the associated price data to a given threshold condition; and

taking a given action if the price data has a given relationship to the given threshold condition.

4. The method as described in Claim **3** wherein the given action is selected from the actions consisting

essentially of issuing an e-mail notification, logging an event, and initiating an e-commerce transaction.

5. The method as described in Claim **1** further including the step of collecting associated price data for the item name over a given period of time to produce historical price data.

6. The method as described in Claim **1** wherein the includes matching criteria that must be met for the item name.

7. The method as described in Claim **6** wherein the matching criteria is an exact match.

8. The method as described in Claim **6** wherein the matching criteria is a fuzzy match.

9. The method as described in Claim **1** wherein the data record also includes secondary source information.

10. A method of collecting product data, comprising the steps of:

generating a set of product profiles each identifying a given site URL, a list of one or more included items to be queried, a scan interval, and a site template;

for a given product profile, periodically retrieving data from the given site URL according to the scan interval;

parsing the data retrieved from the given site URL according to the site template to generate a data record for each included item comprising an item name, an associated price value, and a secondary source; and

storing the data records.

11. The method as described in Claim **10** wherein the given product profile also includes a list of excluded items.

12. The method as described in Claim **10** wherein the given product profile also includes a next scan date.

13. The method as described in Claim **12** wherein the given product profile also includes a threshold expression comprising a set of one or more triggers.

14. The method as described in Claim **13** wherein the given product profile also includes a threshold action that is triggered if the threshold expression resolves to a given value.

Docket # AUS000168US1 Date: 6/6/2006 I.D. # 006372.00296:512389.01

15. A computer program product having a set of instructions executable by a processor for use in a client computer for collecting product data according to the following method steps:

generating a set of product profiles each identifying a given site URL, a list of one or more included items to be queried, a scan interval, and a site template;

for a given product profile, periodically retrieving data from the given site URL according to the scan interval; and

parsing the data retrieved from the given site URL according to the site template to generate a data record for each included item comprising at least an item name and an associated price value.

16. A computer program product in a computer-useable medium, comprising:

code for generating a profile identifying a given site URL, at least one item to be queried, a scan interval, and a site template;

code for retrieving data from the given site URL at the scan interval; and

code for parsing the retrieved data according to the site template to generate a data record comprising an item name and an associated price value.

17. A database for use in managing a pricing agent in a computer, comprising:

a pricing profile table comprising a set of profile records, each record identifying a URL site, a list of included items, a scan interval, and a pointer to a site template;

a site template table comprising a set of site templates, each site template comprising lexical instructions for parsing a data stream to identify given data;

a price table comprising a set of pricing records, each record identifying an item name, an associated price value, and at least one source.

18. The database as described in Claim **17** further including a threshold table comprising a set of threshold records, each record identifying a threshold type, a threshold value, and a threshold comparison operator.

19. The database as described in Claim **17** wherein each profile record further includes a list of excluded items.

20. A computer, comprising:

a browser;

a database comprising:

a pricing profile table comprising a set of profile records, each record identifying a URL site, a list of included items, a scan interval, and a pointer to a site template;

a site template table comprising a set of site templates, each site template comprising lexical instructions for parsing a data stream to identify given data; and

a price table comprising a set of pricing records, each record identifying an item name, an associated price value, and at least one source; and

code executable in the browser during processing of a given pricing profile record at the scan interval for parsing data retrieved from the URL site according to the site template to generate a data record for each included item.